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ABSTRACT

Ways in which communications about educational finance can be custom-tailored to particular social groups was the subject of this investigation. Four socioeconomic groups in Dayton, Ohio were selected for analysis: low income blacks, low income whites, upper income blacks, and upper income whites. Fifty individuals were selected from each group to read and react to a basic document entitled, "Paying for Our Schools." On the basis of reader reactions, the basic document was customized for each audience. This document describes the survey procedures and presents the results of the survey of low income blacks to illustrate the process. (DN)

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Interim Progress Report

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Interim Progress Report

Project No. RO 20399

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INFORMING THE PUBLIC ABOUT ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS FOR FINANCING THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

September 1972

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION, AND WELFARE

Office of Education

National Center for Educational Communication

COMMUNICATIONS COALITION FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Interim Report to the National Center for Educational Communication

September 1972

I. Introduction

In May of 1972 the Communications Coalition for Educational Change launched a targeted communications project funded by the National Center for Educational Communication. Entitled Informing the Public About Alternative Options for Financing the Public Schools, the project was designed to accomplish two primary objectives. The first of these goals concerned the preparation of a communications document that could be used to familiarize various segments of the public with the issues underlying a current and important educational problem: the financing of public education. The second objective involved a dual set of goals: a comparative examination of the ways in which variations of this document might be adapted to the special nature of specific audiences, and a similar comparison of alternative techniques for disseminating the document among various target audiences.

We have sought, in this interim report, to first summarize what has been accomplished to date. Next, we have provided an explanation of the self-corrective modifications that have been imposed on the basic proposal. These changes, relating essentially to phase timing and locale, were initiated because the

Coalition believes that research and development efforts ought not adhere rigidly to the wrong path, in mindless obedience to a pre-conceived plan. Rather, as the life-span of a project unfolds, we believe it both sensible and prudent to make minor corrections in course whenever circumstances so warrant. We recognize, of course, that proposal plans are meant to be followed, and we have consulted with our NCEC project officer regarding the appropriateness of the deviations.

Finally, the interim report contains an overview of what is planned for the project's immediate future. To wit, we are now convinced that it may be possible not only to fulfill the obligations stipulated in the proposal, but also go beyond these and produce a short guide on useful communication principles that can be made available to other agencies. It should be noted, in this regard, that while we do not fancy ourselves as visionary theorists capable of instructing the less-blessed, we do believe that we may have hit upon a number of practical generalizations that may be of interest and value to other groups engaged in similar communications activities.

To begin at the beginning, then, it might be well to restate the project's ambitions.

II. Project Purpose

At the inception of the project, in connection with an-

other endeavor, the Coalition had identified four discrete sub-cultures within the Dayton school district. One consisted of a large black community with its own special educational values and aspirations; one was a lower-middle class white community, politically conservative and strongly opposed to the present system; one was an affluent middle-class group, generally satisfied with the present condition of the schools; and the fourth consisted of a different middle-class group, one that strongly favored extreme educational change and an increased emphasis upon what has come to be known as humanistic education.

At the point of inception, moreover, Dayton clearly was a city in crisis. The taxpayers had repeatedly rejected bond issues, the school district was on the verge of bankruptcy, the schools had been closed, and thousands of children were at home, idle.

Moreover, to further enrich the drama, at the inception the Coalition also was mid-stream in an earlier Dayton project, a study intended to illuminate the educational beliefs and aspirations of four sub-cultures very much like those alluded to above. A major quest in this study was to determine the communication factors that are most influential in shaping people's attitudes and beliefs. In short, it is hard to conceive of a work setting that would have been more fertile or provocative.

It was within this rather intoxicating arena, then, that the Coalition started to accomplish the specific purposes of the present project. We wanted to start, in the traditional manner of a targeted communications project by preparing a communications message that embodied in synthesized form the best of the available research on the topic --- in this instance: the problems of public school finance. But, in contrast to most other targeted communications projects, we wanted to work not with a professional audience but with segments of the public-at-large. More specifically, we wished to test the efficacy of our communications message with four citizens groups, each of which was dedicated to a different educational ideology, and each of which was responsive to different communications techniques. In sum, we were after a methodology that would not only produce multiple forms of a badly needed communications "package", but one that would also yield at least some of the elements in a dissemination formula that could be applied in other places and times.

Represented sequentially, the tasks embodied in our purpose were as follows:

1. The preparation of a preliminary document on the monetary support of the public schools.
2. The testing of this document's communications effectiveness with four different citizens groups.

3. The evaluation of the resulting evidence, and the interpretation of this evidence in the light of contemporary mass communications theory.
4. The development of a set of specifications that would outline the changes necessary for an effective "targeting" of the basic statements for each group.
5. The preparation of four revised statements tailored to the communications preferences of each of the four groups.
6. The evaluation of each of these secondary statements in a test situation, and
7. The simultaneous comparison of various dissemination strategies that could be used to disseminate the secondary statements.

It should be noted, parenthetically, that this last task necessitated the first two minor modifications in the original plan. In our proposal, we stipulated that the comparison of dissemination strategies would be carried out in conjunction with the evaluation of the basic statement. We later decided, however, that a better dissemination test could be obtained if the investigation was delayed until the four revised statements were ready for distribution. Accordingly, task seven has been shifted from Phase II to Phase III in the work flow.

At the point of this interim report, the basic statement has been produced, the initial test with four of Dayton's sub-cultures has been performed, the test results have been analyzed, the writing of the four secondary statements is nearing completion, and arrangements are underway for the second testing of the revised materials. It is in this regard that another change in the basic proposal has occurred. Following the initial evaluations, we concluded that, rather than re-test in Dayton, much would be gained if the revised statements on school finances were tested with similar sub-cultural groups in other urban areas. As a consequence, the next series of evaluations will take place in Chicago and New York. This maneuver, we believe, will serve to increase the reliability of our conclusions.

To summarize matters, then, our mission was to learn more about the ways in which communications messages can be custom-tailored to particular social groups. In most current practice, communications messages are directed toward a mythical "general public" rather than toward a variety of specific "publics". We seem to have forgotten, in other words, that people's values and beliefs tend to shape their vested interests. Worse, we have behaved, in our "communicating" as if social groups did not differ widely in their beliefs about education. Put another way, if public opinion on educational issues is to be sharpened

and clarified, the communications devices that are used must fit a group's frame of reference as closely as possible. What it means, in practical terms, is that the gist of a message must be set forth in a format and context most appropriate to the particular target audience. The critical question which follows upon the expression of a seemingly good, but difficult, idea is: yes! but how? It is precisely this question that most preoccupies us in the present study.

III. The Work To Date

By way of detailing the accomplishments which thus far have been reached, the stage can perhaps best be set by a brief recital of the events that have taken place. First, we established a working arrangement with both the leaders and followers of four distinct sub-cultures in Dayton, Ohio. Second, we analyzed the available research literature on school finance to obtain a valid message that could be communicated to these groups. Third, we explored the existing findings from social science research on mass communications and attitudinal change in order to learn more about how this statement might best be communicated. Fourth, we engaged a professional newspaper writer and a university scholar specializing in school finance, asked the two to work in tandem, and produced our basic communication document (A copy of this booklet is included in the interim report attachments).

Fifth, working with the Ombudsman's Office in Dayton, Ohio, we developed a survey instrument. A format was devised that would provide a quick, easy, uniform and relatively accurate recording of the criticisms we wished to acquire. The instrument contained statements about the basic document which could be rated on a four point scale, ranging from Agree Strongly to Disagree Strongly. No neutral point was included. Sixth, we administered the survey to four specific populations. These included (1) a low-income black group ($5,000 a year or below), (2) a black upper-middle income group (between $10,000 and $15,000), (3) a low-income white group ($5,000 per year or below), and (4) a white upper-middle income group ($10,000 to $15,000). Seventh, in administering the survey, we selected and trained a status leader from each group who served as an interviewer and who fulfilled the following tasks: (a) identify and contact 50 persons, for the most part by phone, and secure their agreement to read and criticize the basic document, Paying for Our Schools; (b) provide a list of the names and addresses of the fifty persons; (c) receive and record their criticisms, again by phone; (4) deliver the 50 completed questionnaires to the program director. Eight, each group's 50 respondents were mailed the basic document and the questionnaire, once initial contact had been established by the interviewer. (The cover letter accompanying this shipment made it clear that the respondent would be asked for criticisms of the document). The respondents were not asked to criticize the information in

the document, but rather the manner in which the information was presented. In brief, they were given to understand that our desire was to make the material more understandable, more readable, and more interesting. There was a deliberate bias to the cover letter so as to facilitate the elicitation of a substantial amount of criticism since our wish was to acquire a maximum number of clues for the document's revision. Ninth, we engaged the Public Opinion Center in Dayton, Ohio to tabulate the questionnaire responses in percentage form.

Though less than ideal in terms of randomization and distribution, the sampling technique assured the Coalition of a completed questionnaire from each respondent. The use of an internal status leader, within the group sub-culture, to request cooperation substantially increased the respondent's willingness to read the document. Moreover, the use of secondary telephone contacts, both to urge reading and to solicit responses, provided a useful personal interaction between interviewer and interviewee --- without necessitating excessive dollar expenditure, expense of time, and the inconvenience of door-to-door interviews. In addition, we later concluded that the fortuitous inclusion of a questionnaire with the basic document also stimulated many readers to read the document carefully, since they knew in advance that they would later answer questions based upon their reading. Tenth, using the clues derived from the

questionnaires, we outlined four separate revisions of the basic document. And last, we engaged additional writers to prepare these revisions.

At the present time, two of these four revisions have been completed (Copies are included in the interim report attachments). We anticipate that the remaining two revisions will be finished during September, and that the secondary tests for "fit", and the comparative analysis of alternate strategies can be carried out during October and November.

To avoid an excessively long interim report, and to eliminate redundancy between this report and the final one, we have not included the total description of the survey here. However, to illustrate the process involved, the survey data from one of the four groups is described below. The material for the other three groups is now available, it should be noted, and can be furnished upon request.

Group I - Low-Income Blacks

Group Description

Group I consisted of fifty black citizens, each of whom earned $5,000 per year or less. Forty-eight of the fifty individuals identified responded to the questionnaire. Of this number, 52% indicated that they had read the document from "cover to cover". Among those that did not complete the reading, only 17% indicated that they had devoted more than 30 minutes to the document. Not suprisingly, the group that failed to complete the reading also neglected to respond to many of the specific questions in the survey instrument. The reasons offered for "failure to read" were many and varied: most said they had not had sufficient time, a few indicated that the material was too confusing, several declared that the print was too small, and one person maintained that "the dog ate the document before I had a chance to read it."

On the other hand, of 52% of respondents who read the booklet from cover to cover, almost 3/4 took half an hour or more for the reading. The large majority of these readers responded to all survey items regarding the document.

The sample questionnaire which follows cites the specific response percentage for the low-income black group.

PERCENTAGES FOR GROUP I

Checklist for
Criticisms of
"PAYING FOR OUR SCHOOLS"

1. Did you read the booklet from "cover to cover"? Yes 52% No 48%

2. Approximately, how much time did you spend reading the booklet?

Percent of "Incomplete" readers		Percent of "Complete" readers	
22	less than 15 minutes	4	less than 15 minutes
9	15 - 30 minutes	12	15 - 30 minutes
4	30 - 60 minutes	44	30 - 60 minutes
4	More than 60 minutes	28	More than 60 minutes
61	No Response	12	No Response

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Read, but No Response*	Not Read, No Response*
	Percent					
3. If this booklet had been at a magazine stand, its outside cover would have caught my eye	2	6	2	40	4	46
4. The absence of a table of contents and page numbers made the booklet more difficult to follow	2	15	2	31	4	46
5. The language was too complicated	2	25	0	23	6	44
6. Graphs and illustrations would make the booklet more readable	2	33	0	15	4	46
7. After reading this booklet once, I feel a group discussion is needed to make its message clear	6	31	0	11	4	48

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Read, but No Response*	Not Read, No Response*
8. The four alternative plans for financing are confusing because not enough information was given about each of them	2	29	4	13	4	48
9. The "paragraph after paragraph" style of the booklet was monotonous	2	19	2	25	4	48
10. The booklet was too long	0	13	2	33	4	48
11. The booklet stimulated my interest in educational financing, and I would like to read more on this topic	6	17	4	19	6	48
12. The information contained in the booklet should have been divided into two booklets - one containing background information, and the other the alternative plans	6	15	2	23	6	48
13. The booklet spent too much time on the court cases	0	21	0	25	6	48
14. Some terms used in the booklet were not explained clearly enough	2	31	0	11	8	48
15. The booklet takes for granted that the reader already knows a great deal about paying for schools	15	21	0	10	6	48
16. After reading the booklet, I am more confused about educational financing than I was before	4	21	4	17	6	48
17. If another booklet like this one were published on another topic dealing with education, I would read it	2	19	6	19	6	48

	Agree Strongly	Agree	Disagree Strongly	Disagree	Read, but No Response*	Not Read, No Response*
18.	0	6	4	36	6	48
19.	2	13	6	25	6	48
20.	0	21	0	25	6	48
21.	8	17	2	19	6	48
22.	6	23	0	17	6	48
23.	8	23	0	15	6	48
24.	6	17	6	17	6	48
25.	0	6	15	25	6	48
26.	6	21	0	17	8	48

18. The information in the booklet was too detailed to hold my attention

19. I would recommend this booklet to my friends and relatives

20. The information in the booklet should have been divided into chapters

21. Too many unimportant and unnecessary facts were included in the booklet

22. The booklet did not contain enough information to present a clear picture of educational financing

23. Cartoons illustrating some of the points in the booklet would make it more interesting

24. The booklet was too opinionated to present a clear picture of the four alternatives

25. The information in the booklet would have been more believable to me if it had been presented in the newspaper

26. A "question and answer" format would have held my attention more than the style used in the booklet

27. The information would have been more interesting to me if it had been presented

		Percent	
On a television show	Yes	38	No 62
On a radio talk show		22	78
In a lecture followed by a question and answer period		42	58
In a group discussion		46	54

28. Other comments: (For example, if you did not read all of the booklet please say why)

(See next Page)

* "Read, but No Response" means that the respondent read the document from "cover to cover" but did not answer the question

* "Not Read, and No Response" means that the respondent did not read the booklet from "cover to cover" and did not answer the question

GROUP I

Other Comments

A. Respondents who read booklet from "cover to cover"

1. Booklet had some confusing section - should have been more of a group discussion (after reading) with someone knowledgeable about it.

2. Main concern that too much authority taken by the teachers

3. Language or dialogue should be down to earth for poor people. Should have been more Dayton rathern than the examples of schools in other states. This lady lives in Edgewood Courts and did not appreciate the racial breakdown - blacks vs. whites - because those people are fighting a battle about equal racial breakdown in their housing.

4. Full coalition should have been explained at beginning of book. She feels the booklet was entirely too complicated for poor people and feels that more poor people would participate in the schools if someone would take the time to explain things to them.

5. Very confusing booklet, did not like at all.

6. Didn't understand the booklet - very confusing.

7. Yes, I read the book. In Ohio we're more interested in our own affairs, not those of other states. Dayton doesn't stand on its own two feet. The kids in school are not going to get an education unless they want. We have under-privileged children where I work and some are good, but most just want the money - $40.00 for U.P. children to be spent on transistors is foolish. I was poor too, but we didn't waste our money. These kids also get paid to go to summer school. What a shame and waste. If they went to school to learn instead of playing on the playgrounds half the day, there wouldn't be so much need for summer school. Lots of these under-privileged children are living better than middle class. Everything is given to them on a silver platter. Cut out the monkey business and get down to brass tacks.

8. Did not like the book.

9. Did not understand booklet - too confusing.

10. She feels that the booklet was too complicated - says that she feels that the booklet should only deal with Dayton schools

11. Really did not like the way it was written (Cases).

B. Respondents who did not read booklet from "cover to cover"

1. Does not have time.

2. Did not have time - she now has two jobs.

3. Had sickness in family - she does not have time to read.

4. Booklet very confusing and hard to understand - needs to be illustrated more.

5. Elderly lady fractured her arm had to go to hospital so has not been able to read.

6. Has been sick so she does not have time to read.

7. Does not have time to read.

8. Did not have time to read. Booklet was too complicated.

9. Did not have time to read booklet.

10. She said she changed her mind and did not want to read it anyway - says she doesn't have time.

11. She said she could not see the print - booklet should have larger print.

12. Did not have time to read booklet.

13. She said she just couldn't understand the language in the booklet.

14. She said she would like something like this on television but does not have time to read this booklet.

15. Goes to work and goes to school - does not have time to read booklet.

16. She said the kids threw the booklet away before she had a chance to read it and that she had changed her mind and didn't want to read it anyway.

17. Did not have time to read the booklet because of her work schedule. She thinks that if this information could be presented on the radio or television she would take the time to watch or listen to it.

18. Interesting to a point - not written for laymen - should have been written for the local area at least Ohio. Print very small - she likes to read but print should be larger. She said some of her friends and relatives read her copy and also felt it was too confusing.

Respondents who did not read booklet (continued)

19. Works at night and has also been ill. Just has not had enough time to read it. Would watch on television or listen to radio program.

20. Has not had time to read it.

21. Didn't finish because she's been sick (Under Doctor's care).

22. Son was ill so she did not have time to read the book

PERCENTAGE FOR GROUP I

Number of Respondents = 48

Checklist for Criticism
of
"PAYING FOR OUR SCHOOLS"

Percent

1. Did you read the booklet from "cover to cover"? Yes 52% No 48%

2. Approximately, how much time did you spend reading the booklet?

Percent of "Incomplete" Readers		Percent of "Complete" Readers	
22	less than 15 minutes	4	less than 15 minutes
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4	30 - 60 minutes	44	30 - 60 minutes
4	More than 60 minutes	28	More than 60 minutes
61	No Response	12	No Response

Criticism of Format

Neither the language nor the format of the document drew strong negative comments from the low-income black group. Inferentially, of course, we can assume that because a substantial number of the respondents did not complete the reading, either the format, the content, the language, or all three were less than optimum.

Among the majority that did finish the reading, there was little indication that the absence of a table-of-contents or an index made the material difficult to follow, or that the "paragraph on paragraph" style of presentation was monotonous. In effect, then, the results verify several ancient communications principles. It is difficult to compel people to read material which they find boring or unrewardingly difficult. Nonetheless, it seems clear that interest and difficulty are a two-sided coin. A man, dismayed by impending baldness, may laboriously wade through a difficult medical treatise, and conversely, one disinterested in athletic events will disregard even the best-written material on the sports page of a newspaper.

The readers seemed about equally divided as to whether the information in the document should have been grouped into shorter sections. Of greater significance, however, they were strongly convinced that the presence of graphs and illustrations would have made the document more readable, and that the

inclusion of illustrative cartoons would have made the material somewhat more interesting. Most of the respondents said that the topic would not have caught their eye at a bookstand.

Although the majority did not regard the document as excessively long, a substantial minority thought that the information should have been separated into two sections --- one containing the background information, and the other the alternative plans. Most respondents also thought that a "question and answer" treatment might have held their attention more effectively than the narrative style used. With respect to the complexity of language, readers opinion was about equally divided: some regarded the material as essentially comprehensible, and some believed that the technical terms should have been explained more carefully.

In what is perhaps the most significant conclusion to be drawn from these results, it is apparent that generalizing about either the reading tastes or preferences of people on the basis of either their race or income level is an exceedingly questionable practice. At least in the Dayton sampling, there is a considerable range of difference in both reading comprehension and reading interest, among a group of people with similar income and racial background. We, therefore cannot assume that the poor are either dull or disinterested in social issues.

Content Criticism

With respect to the subject matter itself, most readers from

the low-income black group did not consider the information too detailed to hold their attention. In point of fact, the majority felt that the document did not contain enough information to furnish them with a clear picture of school finance. A number of respondents, for example, said that the document seemed to make an unwarranted assumption to the effect that most readers already knew a good deal about the problem of paying for education. In particular, they were of the view that the lack of informational detail made the presentation of four alternative plans of school finance somewhat confusing.

About half the group thought the document devoted too much time to the court cases, and about the same percentage felt that too many unimportant and unnecessary facts were included. These findings would seem to illuminate one more clue regarding message construction: the reader's interest in detail varies according to his focal point of interest. Thus, readers interested in reducing their taxes seek one sort of factual evidence, and those interested in improving the quality of education look for other kinds of informational detail.

In what we regarded as perhaps the most astounding response of all, the readers were about equally divided in their belief that the document was too opinionated. In preparing the statement, the Coalition's writers devoted an enormous amount of effort toward achieving a fair, impartial and unbiased representation of the facts. Moreover, experts in the field verified the materials' objectivity before the survey was initiated. We

are forced to conlcude, therefore, that people unaccustomed to a comparison of alternatives tend to infect messages with their own illusions of prejudice. That is, even when a series of arguments are basically impartial, readers with a strong set of beliefs about a problem are likely to think that the message gives too much support to the enemy's position.

The scars of the poverty they endure are deeply etched in the psychic attics of the poor. What for them is most relevant, in any discussion of schooling, is the kind of education that will permit their children to escape their plight. Compared to this concern, all other aspects of school finance are of minor importance.

Reader Effect

We had reason to assume, in our preliminary conjectures, that after reading the document, every reader would have a clearer understanding of school support than before. We found, however, that a large percentage of the readers were more confused after their reading than at the start. Our initial reaction to this unsuspected turn of events was a mixture of chagrin and embarassment. As we explored the secondary implications, however, we concluded that such a result probably was inevitable. When people with no previous background are introduced to a complex and somewhat technical problem the first exposure is likely to leave them a bit confused. We often assume, for example, that we understand a particular phenomena. If we are forced to

examine the phenomena in great detail, we may find that our previous understanding contained a number of misperceptions and misconceptions. Inevitably, then, going back to the beginning to eliminate faulty ideas may seem like a discomforting and confusing exercise. But unless this period of temporary confusion is outlived, the goal of a clearer understanding cannot be reached.

Roughly 50% of the respondents indicated that their interest in the dollar problems of the schools had been stimulated by the document, and that they would like to read more on the topic. Importantly, however, almost half of the readers said that they would not be interested in similar documents on a different educational topic, and that they would be unwilling to recommend the present one to their friends and relatives. Consequently, we were once again compelled to acknowledge the ancient dictum to the effect that when the message does not pique the receiver's interest, some additional stimulating elements must be added. All of this is to reinforce, in effect, what every advertising executive already knows intuitively: controversy, humor and entertainment are invaluable devices for sugar-coating an otherwise unappealing pill.

Alternative Preferences

When asked to indicate the ways in which the information might have been more interestingly presented, a slight majority of the respondents suggested a kind of town-hall meeting. The

respondents were also of the belief that other modes of presentation such as lecture followed by question and answer, a television show, or a radio-talk show, would not substantially increase the interest of the material. Most readers also felt that a group discussion was needed to make the document's message more clear. And of special interest, most did not feel that the arguments would have been more believable if they had appeared in a newspaper.

Suggested Document Revisions

From the foregoing, it is possible to approximate the kinds of modifications necessary to increase the fit between the message and its target audience. To begin with, the document presumed more basic knowledge about school financing than was actually the case. Although roughly half of the respondents were sufficiently interested in the topic to read the booklet completely, many felt that the presentation was confusing and the terminology unnecessarily complicated. Thus, a more incisive format, greater simplicity of style, the use of questions and answers, and the introduction of graphs and, possibly, cartoons --- are indicated.

Much of the information was new to the readers but they clearly sensed that it could be utilized in the ongoing Dayton community debate regarding school financing. Basically, this supports the research evidence (Brock, Albert, and Becker, 1970) that people prefer information which is unfamiliar and useful

to them. It also supports those authors (Zellner, 1970) who have found that the susceptibility to social influence is mediated by the complexity of the message and the person's self-esteem. If we can assume that low self-esteem and low socio-economic levels are highly correlated, we must then reduce the complexity of any document tailored to low-income groups. This reduced complexity should make the message more easy to comprehend, and, in turn, a more easily understood message should enhance self-esteem, thus increasing the reader's willingness to be influenced by the message.

In our revision of the basic document, in which we are seeking to customize the material to the preferences of the target audience, we began by shortening the length and sharpening the language. Then we made a concerted effort to use illustrative examples that were both more simple and more germane to the concerns of the audience. In keeping with the other clues we derived, the format has been altered, the print enlarged, and the "paragraph upon paragraph" style interrupted with periodic questions. And, since the secondary tests of "fit" will take place in Chicago and New York, we tried to include information of greater relevance to residents of these geographical areas.

We are left, nonetheless, with two powerful obstacles: low-income black citizens, in the main, do not favor print as their preferred communications medium, and, the topic of school finance

does not carry strong appeal for them. To cope with the first of these two obstacles we have tried, in the re-write, to insert several storyline episodes that may enhance the entertainment and human-interest elements of the material. To counteract the second of the two obstacles, we have attempted to dramatize the importance of the topic, and to demonstrate, somewhat more clearly, its social significance. The potency of these attempted correctives will become apparent when we initiate the new series of evaluations in early October.

IV. Unfinished Business

During the remaining life of the project, four specific endeavors must transpire. First, we must complete our re-writes of the basic document, tailoring two additional versions to low-income white audiences and middle-income white audiences. It should be noted here, that although the specifications for the revision of the middle-income black publication is not discussed in this report, a copy of the revision is included in the attached materials. It is perhaps worth observing, if only parenthetically, that the "customizing" of the document for middle-income black groups was somewhat easier than that for the low-income blacks. The primary reason was that middle-income people, as a group, tend to be somewhat more literate and somewhat more interested in print communication than low-income groups. As a consequence, we were able to analyze the literary styles of such

popular magazines as Jet and Ebony in order to achieve a mode commensurate with the audiences' reading habits.

Once all four re-writes are in hand, we will launch the second series of "tests of fit". Arrangements have been made with three social agencies, one in the affluent suburbs of Chicago, one in the inner-city of Chicago, and one in Harlem. Again using the services of a local status leader, we plan to distribute the revised documents and conduct another telephone assessment.

The major new feature of these secondary evaluations, of course, lies in the comparison of five alternative dissemination strategies. Our plans are precisely those specified in the proposal to NCEC. Employing normal controls for a random sampling, we will contrast the following five dissemination treatments, using 25 or more persons in each of the four groups:

(a) Direct Delivery (mailing or handing the package to an individual, with an invitation to read).

(b) Leader Distribution (personal delivery by a status leader, with strong urging to read).

(c) Media Reinforcement (leader distribution, non-personal, coupled with radio and television).

(d) Multiple Short-Term Exposure (direct delivery in which the package is delivered three times, in three smaller sections, to achieve multiple exposure).

(e) Follow-up Task (leader distribution coupled with follow-up group discussions during which elements of this package are debated).

It is always difficult to predict the outcome of a project that is mid-stream because in research, as in many other human actions,

plans often run afoul of unsuspected predicaments. In the present instance, however, we cannot help but feel a reasonable sense of optimism. Our evidence already suggests, for example, that the basic document serves a most useful purpose in the way of familiarizing both professionals and laymen with the more important aspects of the school finance crisis besetting the nation. The early extra-project distributions, for example, seem to have met with considerable approval. All in all, the statement is legitimate in its scholarship, reasonably comprehensive in its coverage, and relatively clear in presentation.

There is reason to hope, moreover, that each of the four revisions will --- in their own way --- help fill a more specialized gap in the literature on the topic. Thus, if no more than these five variations of a targeted communications document emerge, the project hopefully will justify its existence. And, if in passing, we add a bit to the professions' understanding of dissemination tactics that work with special segments of the general public, so much the better.